

F. E. Grossmann defines the term "ar, very, ad. (prefix)", and over a hundred and fifty of his terms illustrate the use of this adjectival or adverbial prefix as an undifferentiated yet vigorous intensive (e. g., ar, female or woman, ar-ar, a lady—great or grand woman; ar-k, high or height, ar-ar-k, highmost); and in the Pimentel vocabulary this signification is attested by several other terms (e. g., "Xerxai, paso menno y bueno"). Finally, the intercalated consonant r is a common participial element in the Piman, while the suffix ai is a habitual assertive termination, as shown by various terms in the Pimentel and other vocabularies. Dropping this termination, the expression becomes ar-err, or—without the nonessential participial element—ar-err, signifying (so far as can be ascertained from the construction of the language) "moving", or "mover", qualified by a vigorous intensive.¹ To one familiar with the strikingly light movement characteristic of the Seri—a movement far lighter than that of the professional sprinter or of the thoroughbred "collected" by a skillful equestrian, and recalling that of the antelope skimming the plain in recurrent impulses of unseen hoof-touches, or that of the alert coyote seemingly floating eerily about the slumbering camp—this appellation appears peculiarly fit; for it is the habit of the errant Seri to roam spryly and swiftly on soundless tiptoes, to come and go like fleeting shadows of passing cloudlets, and on detection to slip behind shrub or rock and into the distance so lightly as to make no audible sign or visible trail, yet so fleetly withal as to evade the hard-riding horseman. The Seri range over a region of runners: the Opata themselves are no mean racers, since, according to Velasco and Bartlett, "In twenty four hours they have been known to run from 40 to 50 leagues";² and, according to Lambholtz, their colliguas, the Tarahumari, or "Counting-Runners", are named from their custom of racing,³ and display almost incredible endurance:

An Indian has been known to carry a letter from Guaymas to Chihuahua and back again in five days, the distance being nearly 300 miles. In some parts where the Tarahumari serve the Mexicans they are used to run in the wild horses, driving them into the corral. It may take them two or three days to do it, sleeping at night and living on a little pine. They bring in the horses thoroughly exhausted, while they themselves are still fresh. They will outrun any horses if you give them time enough. They will pursue deer in the snow or with dogs in the rain for days and days, until at last the animal is cornered and shot with arrows or falls on easy prey from sheer exhaustion, its hoofs dropping off.⁴

¹The latter form (ar-err) corresponds precisely with the current Papago pronunciation of the term, though none of the various Papago informants consulted were able to interpret the expression; indeed, they simply relegated it to the category of "old names" which they deemed it needless to discuss. An archaic form of orthography, noted in the synonymy (pp. 128-129), is Xerxi, which suggests the same sounding of the initial syllable.

²From 160 to 120 miles. Bartlett, Personal Narratives, vol. 1, p. 113.

³Minutes of the International Congress of Anthropology, Chicago, 1904, p. 394. In a letter to Mr. F. W. Hodge, under date of September 11, 1905, Dr. Lambholtz says: "After renewed investigation I have come to another opinion regarding the meaning of the tribal name *Tarahumara*. This word is a Spanish corruption of the native name 'Rahumari'. Though the meaning of this word is not clear, that much is certain that *ra* is of *hara* means 'foot', and I therefore take it that we must be at least approximately correct when we say that the word signifies 'foot-runner'."

⁴American Anthropologist, vol. VII, 1905, p. 92.

171/481 The Papago, of the same region and linguistic stock, have a racing game in which a ball of wood or stone caught on the foot is thrown, followed, and thrown again until the two or more rival racers have covered 20 to 40 miles in the course of a few hours; and their feats as couriers and trailers are quite up to those of the Opata. Yet among all these tribes, and among the Mexicans as well, the Seri are known as the runners par excellence of the Sonoran province; and it is but natural that their astounding swiftness and lightness of foot should have brought them an appellation among contemporaries to whom these qualities peculiarly appeal.

101 Accordingly, both derivation and connotation give meaning to the name, and warrant the rendering (much weakened by linguistic infelicities) of "spry" or "spry-moving", used in substantive sense and with an intensive implication.

101/114/175/197 The chronicles of the tribe, especially those written during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, indicate that the alien designation was applied loosely and with little appreciation of the tribal organization, just as was the case elsewhere throughout the continent. Gradually the chroniclers took cognizance of intertribal and intratribal relations, and introduced various distinctions in nomenclature expressing tribal or subtribal distinctions of greater or less importance. One of the earliest distinctions was that between the Seri and the Tepoka, and this distinction has been consistently maintained by nearly all later authorities, despite the commonly accepted fact (brought out most authoritatively by Harty, that the tongues of the tribes are substantially alike. Another early distinction was that made between the Seri and the Guaymas; it was based primarily on diversity of habitat and persistent enmity, though all the earlier authorities agreed, as well shown by Ramirez, that the tongues were essentially identical. The distinction has been maintained by most authorities and strongly emphasized by one (Pinart, as quoted by Handeller), and since the Guaymas are extinct, and hence beyond reach of direct inquiry, the early interpretation of tribal relation must be perpetuated. Still another distinction was that made between the Upanguaymas and the Guaymas, and inferentially the Seri also; although the grounds for this distinction were not specifically stated, it seems to have grown out of diversity in habitat merely; but there were clear implications that the tribe or subtribe was affiliated linguistically with the Guaymas, and hence with the Seri, and this assignment has been adopted by leading authorities, including Pimentel and Orozco. Among the earlier distinctions based on Indian

¹ In view of the clear indications, both a priori and a posteriori, that the latest Guaymas survivors must have taken the language of the Pima (Yaqui) tribesmen with whom they found refuge, and in view of his failure thus far to present his data for public consideration, M. Pinart's inference that the Guaymas belonged linguistically to the Pima stock can hardly be admitted to hold against the specific statements of the Jesuit missionaries and such accomplished inquirers as Ramirez and Pimentel.

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its astounding protective efficiency being attested by the readiness with which the Seri run through cactus thickets so thorny as to stop horses and dogs, or over conglomerated spall-beds so sharp that even the light coyote leaves their trail. In the absence of measurements it may merely be noted that the hands and feet of the Seri are materially larger, not only absolutely but relatively to their stature, than those of neighboring tribesmen or even of Mexican and American workmen. And, on the whole, it may be said that in their proportions, as in their stature and color, the Seri are strikingly uniform, their range being less than that commonly observed in contemporary tribes, and the differences between them and their neighbors much exceeding the range among themselves.

Somatically distinctive as is the Seri at rest, he (or she) is much more so in motion—though the characteristics so readily caught by the eye are not easily analyzed and described. Perhaps the most conspicuous element in their walk is a peculiarly quick knee movement, bringing the foot upward and forward at the end of the stride; this merges into an equally quick thrust of the foot forward and downward, with toe well advanced, toward the beginning of the next stride; and these motions combine to produce a singular erectness and steadiness of carriage, the body moving in a nearly direct line with a minimum of lateral swaying or vertical oscillation, while the legs neither drag nor swing, but spurn the ground in successive strokes. Thus the walk seems notably easy and graceful, while the walker carries an air of alertness and reserve power, as if able to stop short at any point of a pace or to bolt forward or backward or sidewise with equal facility; he simulates the "collected" animal whose feet tap the ground lightly and swiftly while his body appears to yield freely to voluntary impulse. In this deer-like or antelope-like movement all the Seri are much alike, and all are decidedly removed from their neighbors, even the light-footed Papago. The component motions are most conspicuous in leisurely walking, though the resultant movement is more striking in rapid walk or the incredibly swift run of youths and adults. The general movement is akin to that shaped by the habit of carrying burdens balanced on the head, as the Seri women actually carry their water ollas for astonishing distances; but the carriage is shared—indeed, best displayed—by the warriors and growing boys, who are not known to carry water in this way.

Among the conspicuous but nondistinctive somatic characters of the Seri is luxuriant straight hair habitually worn long and loose. Commonly the hair is jet-black for most of the length, growing tawny toward the tips; sometimes it is black throughout, while again the tawny tinge, or perhaps a bleached appearance, extends well toward the scalp. Age-grayness seems not to be characteristic; the most aged matrons known have no more than a few inconspicuous and scattered gray hairs, though the pelage of some is slightly bleached or faded. None of the warriors at Costa Rica showed the slightest grayness except

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blocks or metates, though it is manifest that most of the camps were fireless and many foodless. It is particularly noteworthy that even the more temporary resting-places are seldom if ever less than a mile or two from the nearest fresh water. In short, the Seri are not a domiciliary folk, but rather homeless wanderers, customarily roving from place to place, frequently if not commonly sleeping where overtaken by exhaustion or storm, ordinarily lumbering through a part of the day and watching by night, habitually avoiding fresh waters save in hurried and stealthy visits, and apparently gathering in their flimsy huts only on special occasions. [36] [312]

In conformity with their rovingness the Seri are notable burden-bearers. They habitually carry their entire stock of personal belongings (arms, implements, utensils, and bedding), as well as their stock of food and—weightiest burden of all—the water requisite for prolonged sustenance amid scorching deserts, in all their wanderings, the water being borne chiefly by women, in ollas, either balanced on the head singly or slung in pairs on rude yokes like those of Chinese coolies. And they have never grasped the idea of imposing their burdens on their bestial associates; their coyote-curs are not harnessed or even led; when they surround and capture horses, burros, and kine they make no use of ropes, never think of mounting even when paraded by vaqueros, but immediately break the necks or club out the brains of the beasts, perchance to tear the writhing body into quarters and flee for their lives with the reeking flesh still quivering on their sturdy heads and brawny shoulders—and scores of vaqueros agree in the affirmation (wholly incredible as it would be if supported by fewer witnesses) that even when so burdened the Seri skim the sand wastes of Desierto Euclinas more rapidly than avenging horsemen can follow. [231] [224] [177] [481]

The hardly conceivable fleetness of the Seri is conformable with their habitual rovingness and their ability as burden-bearers; and this faculty is established by cumulative evidence so voluminous and consistent as to outweigh the presumption arising from the standards attained among other peoples. A few minutes after they were photographed, the group of boys shown in plate XVI, with several others of about the same size, provided themselves with a stock of their favorite human-hair cords, "rounded up" a dozen mongrel coyote-dogs haunting the rancharia at Costa Rica, and herded the unwilling animals toward a shrubbery-free space a quarter of a mile away, in order to rope them in imitation of the work of the Mexican cowboys earlier in the morning. From time to time as they went a frightened ear sneaked or broke through the cordon of boys, and made for distant shrub-tufts at top speed; yet in every case a boy darted from the ring, headed off the animal within one or two hundred yards, and lashed it back to its place. On arriving at their miniature rodeo the boys widened their ring, and at a signal scattered and frightened the dogs; then, when the fleeing animals had a fair start, each selected his victim and fol- [177] [231] [481] [857]

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lowed it, yelling and swinging his light lasso, until, after much doubling and dodging and many unsuccessful casts, he caught and dragged the howling beast back to the open; and it was only after half a dozen repetitions that enough dogs had escaped to spoil the sport. As the boys lounged chattering back toward the rancharia their course lay between two clumps of the usual desert shrubbery, so placed that when the first was obliquely left and 40 or 50 feet distant from them, the other was obliquely right and 100 feet away. At this point a bevy of small birds (perhaps blackbirds—at any rate corresponding to blackbirds in size and flight) fluttered suddenly out of the nearer clump toward the more distant one, when, too instantaneously for the untrained eye to catch exchange of signal or beginning of movement, the boys lunged forward in a common effort to seize the birds; and though none were entirely successful, one exultantly displayed a tuft of feathers clutched by his fingers as the bird darted into and through the thorny harbor. When the distances were paced it was found that, although the birds had the advantage of the start, the boys covered at least 90 per cent of their distance in the same time; while the spontaneity of the impulse demonstrated habitual chase of flying game under fit conditions.

124 While obtaining the Seri vocabulary with Mashém's aid, advantage was taken of every opportunity to secure collateral information concerning the actual use of the terms, and thereby of gaining insight into the tribal habits. Through his naive explanations, usually repeated and corroborated by the elderwoman of the Turtle clan (Juana Maria) and others of the tribe, it was learned that half-grown Seri boys are fond of hunting hares (jack-rabbits); that they usually go out for this purpose in threes or fours; that when a hare is started they scatter, one following it slowly while the others set off obliquely in such manner as to head it off and keep it in a zigzag or doubling course until it tires; and that they then close in and take the animal in their hands, frequently bringing it in alive to show that it was fairly caught—for it is deemed discreditable, if not actually wrong, to take game animals without giving them opportunity for escape or defense by exercise of their natural powers. Similarly, Mashém described the chase of the bura and other deer as ordinarily conducted by five persons (of whom four or two may be youths), who scatter at sight of the quarry, gradually surround it, bewilder it by confronting it at all points, and finally close in either to seize it with their hands, or perhaps to brain it with a stone or short club; the former being held the proper way and the latter a partial failure. This hunting custom, described as a commonplace by Mashém, is established by the vaqueros who had frequently witnessed it from a distance; and the same extra-tribal observers described still more striking feats of individual Seri hunters: Don Manuel, son of Señor Encinas, and Don Ygnacio Lozania were endeavoring to train to work a robust Seri (one of a band sojourning temporarily at Costa

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Rica) noted for his prowess in hunting. One hot afternoon he begged relief from his tasks, saying the spirit of catching a deer had held on him; and he was excused on condition that the deer be brought entire to the rancho. Two hours later he was seen driving in a full-grown buck; on approaching the rancho the terrified animal turned this way and that, describing long arcs in wild efforts to avoid the human habitation; yet the hunter kept beyond it, heading it off at every turn and gradually working it nearer, until, at a sudden turn, he was able to rush on it; whereupon he caught it, throw it over his shoulders, and ran in to the rancho with the animal still struggling and kicking off its overheated hoofs. 224

Señor Encinas himself, with Don Andre's Noriega and several other attaches, vouch for the catching of a horse by a Seri hunter in still more expeditious fashion: one of the horses belonging to the rancho was exceptionally fat, and hence exceptionally tempting to the Seri band (and at the same time worthless to the vaqueros); the chief begged for it persistently until, wearied by his importunities, the ranchero offered the horse to the band on condition that a single one of them should catch it within a fixed distance (about 200 yards) from the gateway of the corral—and the offer was promptly accepted. With the view of making the test of fleetness fair, a vaquero was called in to frighten the horse and start him running around the interior of the corral, while a boy stood by to drop the bars at the proper moment, the Indian standing ready outside the gateway; when the animal had gained its best speed the bars were dropped and it bolted for the open plains—but before the 200-yard limit was reached the hunter had overtaken it, leaped on its withers, caught it by the jaw in one hand and the foretop in the other, and thereby thrown it in such manner as to break its neck. Knowing of these and other instances, L. K. Thompson, of Hermosillo, undertook arrangements for publicly exhibiting Seri runners as deer catchers at different expositions during the nineties; but his arrangements failed, chiefly because of the anticipated (and probably underestimated) difficulty of taming the Seri sufficiently for the purpose. [48]

About 1893, Señor Encinas and several attendants left Costa Rica one morning for Hermosillo, leaving at the rancho, among others, a Seri matron with a sick child nearly a year old; in the evening (as they learned later) the child was worse, and the matron took the trail about dusk, in the hope of finding a cure in the white man's touch or other medicine—and at dawn next morning she was at Molino del Encinas, 17 leagues (nearly 45 miles) away, with her helpless child and a peace offering in the form of a hare, which she had run down and caught in the course of the journey. And the matrons, with children astride their hips and water-filled ollas balanced on their heads, and all their goods and chattels piled on their backs, habitually traverse Desierto Encinas from the sea to Costa Rica (some 30 miles), or from Costa Rica to the sea, in a night. [48]

● 481 Examples of Seri feckness and endurance might be multiplied indefinitely, and many of still more striking character might be adduced; but these instances, all attested by several witnesses, all corroborated by independent facts, and all consistent with the observations of the 1894 expedition, seem fairly to represent one aspect of the pedestrian habit of the tribe.

412 A trait of the Seri hardly less conspicuous than their pedestrian habit is habitual use of hands and teeth in lieu of the implements characteristic of even the lowly culture found among most primitive tribes. Perhaps the most nearly universal implement is the knife—at first of shell, tooth, bone, or wood, later of stone, and last of metal—and hardly a primitive tribe known from direct observation or from relics has been found independent of this most serviceable implement; yet the Seri may be described with reasonable accuracy as a knifeless folk. Awls and marlinspikes of bone and wood, shell cups, and protolithic millers or hammers are found in numbers in their hands, on their rancheria sites, and in their ancient shell accumulations, while rudely chipped stone arrowpoints are sparsely scattered over their range; yet not a single knife of stone or other wrought substance has been found in their territory or in their possession, save for an occasional metal knife obtained by theft or barter. And the habit of dispensing with this primary implement is attested both by everyday customs and by the traditions and chronicles concerning the tribe. Thus, various observers (notably Hardy) have recorded the features and uses of balsas, harpoons, ollas, etc., yet no records of cutting implements have been found; similarly the chronicles contain records of barter between the Seri and the Sonorense through which the savages acquired aguardiente, manta, garments, sugar, grain, etc., yet no record is known of the leading articles of exchange to practically all other tribes of the continent, viz, cutlery; and in like manner the local traditions recount the constant desire of the Seri for liquor and tobacco, saccharine and other food substances, clothing or material for making it, tin cups, lard-cans, and other metallic utensils, as well as nails for harpoons and hoop-iron for arrowpoints, in addition to firearms and ammunition; yet the recounters are significantly silent on the subject of knives.

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264 Conformably, the 60 Seri gathered near Costa Rica in 1894 made it their business to pick up or beg all sorts of industrial products and materials, yet apparently did not possess so many as a dozen knives in the entire band; and while protolithic implements, ollas, shell cups, paint-stones, etc., were seen in constant use, none of the men, women, or children were observed to use knives for cutting meat or for any other customary purpose. Among the supplies laid on top of the jacal shown in plate X, to keep them out of the way of the dogs, was a hind leg of a horse, from femur to hoof (some three days dead and still

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182 to prepared defence or attack. The Seri mode of life and induced temperament must have led to many instabilities, with make-shifts often actually more in use, but finished or efficient types of artifact seemingly latent and sporadically emerging in the stream of their culture. Thus, the shell alongside the double-bladed paddle; plain baskets seen in use, but a series patterned in a definite style being produced as soon as their manufacture was profitable; unroofed and roofed houses. Similarly, the two-pointed fish-spear and olla carrying-net, which neither McGee nor I saw, but which may persist in memory in the culture ready for revival on occasion.

[595] Somewhat similar, perhaps, is the status of polygyny, which prevailed in McGee's day (p. 279) a half generation after a disastrous war, but was not the rule, or was successfully disavowed, in earlier times and to-day.

Errors and Misconstructions

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481 McGee dwells at length (pp. 152-156) on three strong trends of Seri life and culture: the pedestrian habit, accompanied by quite exceptional fleetness; a hand and tooth sense with corresponding absence of tool sense; and a race sense unalterably opposed to mixture with alien blood.

All the Sonora and Southwestern Indians were and largely still are fast and sustained long-distance travelers on foot. There is nothing to show that the Seri were superior to the others. The one time they remember having met the Papago in a foot-hall race, they were beaten. Yaqui warfare is a record of at least equal endurance and ability to evade superior civilized forces. In fact the faculties of the Yaqui are the more remarkable in that they have always been settled farmers and often moved in larger bodies. The incredible fleetness of the Seri was probably most manifest in mesquite thickets and on rocky ground. That they should outrun a horseman on an open plain is the sort of tale that one hears on every frontier and which the more intelligent frontiersman does not take seriously.

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181 Hand and tooth sense was undoubtedly strong among the Seri. The same thing, especially as regards food, is reported for the Lower Californians. But the inference of lack of tool sense is erroneous. Knives are prized by the Seri, and, along with nails, axes, and the like, are handled with a direct, crude effectiveness. The crudity is due to the lack of standard, order, and interest in finish which pervades all Seri cultural manifestations and which rests ultimately on their essential isolation and self-sufficiency in an unusually forbidding environment. What a Seri is interested in is not a neat job but one that will substantially meet his immediate need. Their modern plank boats are weak in plan, badly joined, and always leaky; but they serve. A structurally stronger boat would probably profit nothing.

283 from coarse, wiry grass stems, and saved all
302 the brushings to be used in the making of strong threads and cords.

147 The fleetness of foot and remarkable physi-
481 cal endurance of these people attest to the rigorous and difficult life in Seriland where the ability of an individual to survive a season of want depended upon the reserve energy of his own body by which he could carry himself long distances in search of food and yet have strength to return to a water-hole, left miles behind. The slender, sinewy limbs and capacious chests of the Seris, in whom no trace of obesity has ever been observed, show clearly the result of untold centuries of selection of the strong by the severity of the environment, where water, [312] too heavy for transport, too difficult of storage, is yet always within reach of an organism strong enough to journey ten, twenty, or even fifty miles in search of it.

224 Perhaps the most severe physical exercise practiced by the Seris was the chase of animal game, particularly since it was often resorted to only after a period of weakening hunger which prompted the all-out effort to obtain adequate food supply. Days of wandering over the deserts in search of vegetable food were sometimes unrewarded, and although rabbits were to be had for the chase, they were too small to be of much consequence in the feeding of a family. The deer were fairly plentiful and provided excellently for a lasting feast.

The deer hunt was conducted by several tribesmen without weapons. When an animal was sighted it was followed by one and circled by others of the party, chased until frantic and exhausted, whereupon one of the men rushed upon it, threw it to the ground and caved in its skull with a stone.

The most avidly sought prey in the Seri chase were the helpless young and heavily pregnant does which were pursued and rent to fragments with a horrible fury, particularly with intent upon the succulent tidbits afforded by the fetal flesh.

222 A time of ease and plenty came each summer, for usually in late May or June the cactus plants with which Seriland abounds begin to mature their fruits. In the foothills of Sierra Seri on the mainland, great

[p.200(B)]

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[123] their tasks and to live among them without undue fear of losing his life. Through the kindness of Señor Thomson the senior author succeeded in making himself a friend of the Seri and, enlarging upon this friendship through long periods of living and traveling among them, has acquired an intimate knowledge of these strange people.

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[161] In 1922 the fishing industry of the Gulf of California was not yet well developed, and it was to be ten years before the village of Kino should appear on the maps of the Sonora coast. The Seris were still isolated in their desert domain and their numbers, then about 250, were maintaining themselves out of reach of the infectious diseases of the white man. The clan life had disappeared, and the people lived as a single tribe with their old chief, Juan Tomas, 90 years old at that time

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FIG. 15. MOVING DAY AMONG THE SERIS
THESE BURDENS, BORNE FOR MANY MILES OVER ROCKS,
THROUGH CACTUS AND DEEP SAND, CONTAIN UTENSILS
FOR HOUSEKEEPING WHEREVER THE SERIS MAY STOP.